Testing a Typology of Family Homelessness in Massachusetts: Preliminary Findings

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Background

- Singles typology experience

- We know homeless families are different:

  - much lower MH/SA rates
  - not different from poor housed families
  - relatively homogeneous

- Potential confounders – policy/program factors

  - transitional shelter as a reform movement
  - federal policy permits 2 year stays
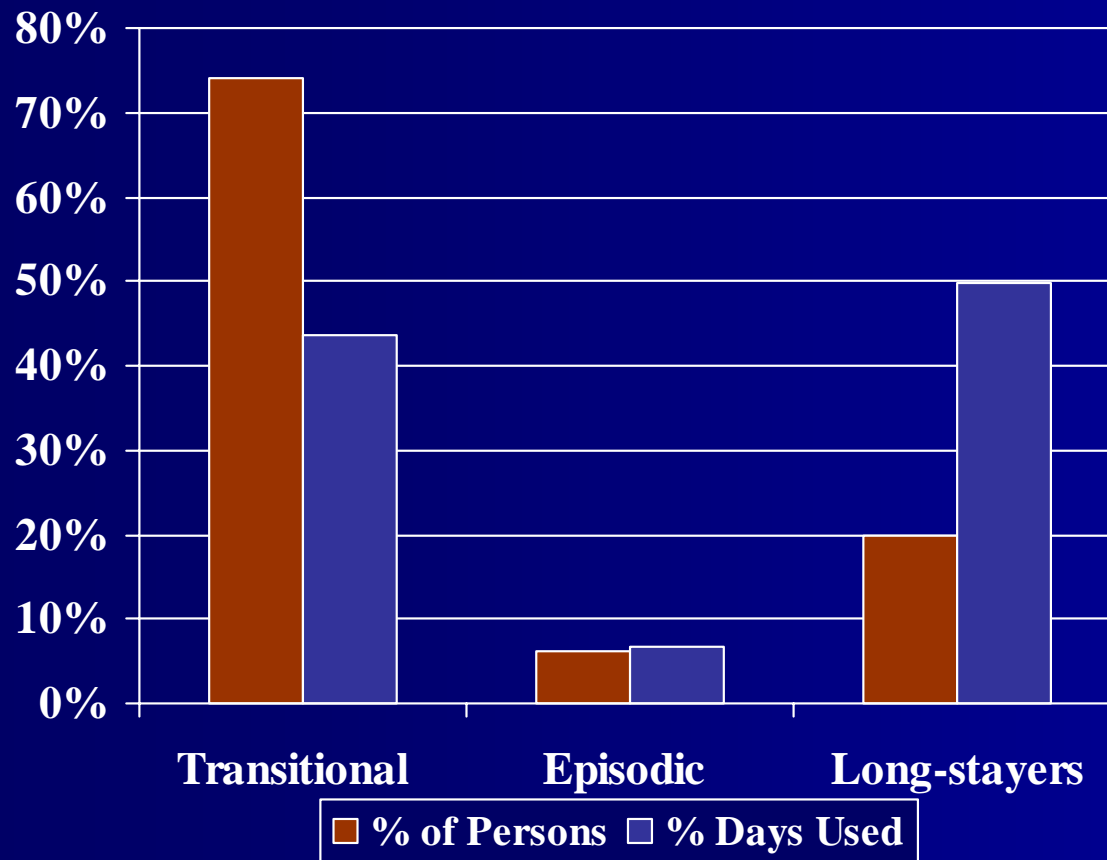 - use of shelters as queuing system for subsidies

Methodology

- HMIS data – 3 months of new admissions followed for two year period
- 30 day exit criterion applied
- Cluster analysis, specifying three cluster solution
- Database merges to identify intensive service histories
- Replicated in 3 other US cities
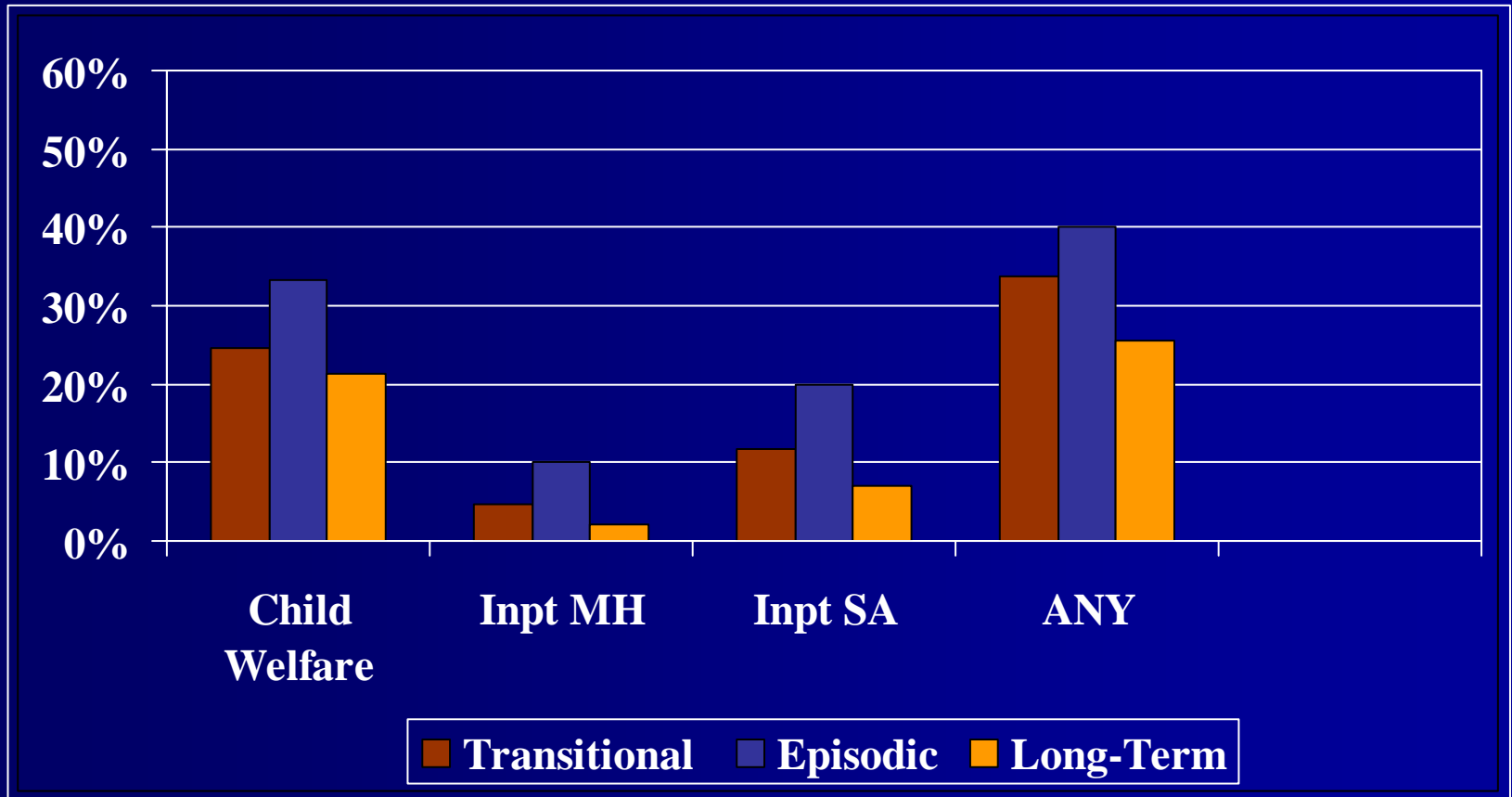
Health and Social Service Databases Merged

- Mental Health (Medicaid inpatient)

- Substance Abuse (inpatient/acute treatment service)

- Child Welfare (preventive and protective services)
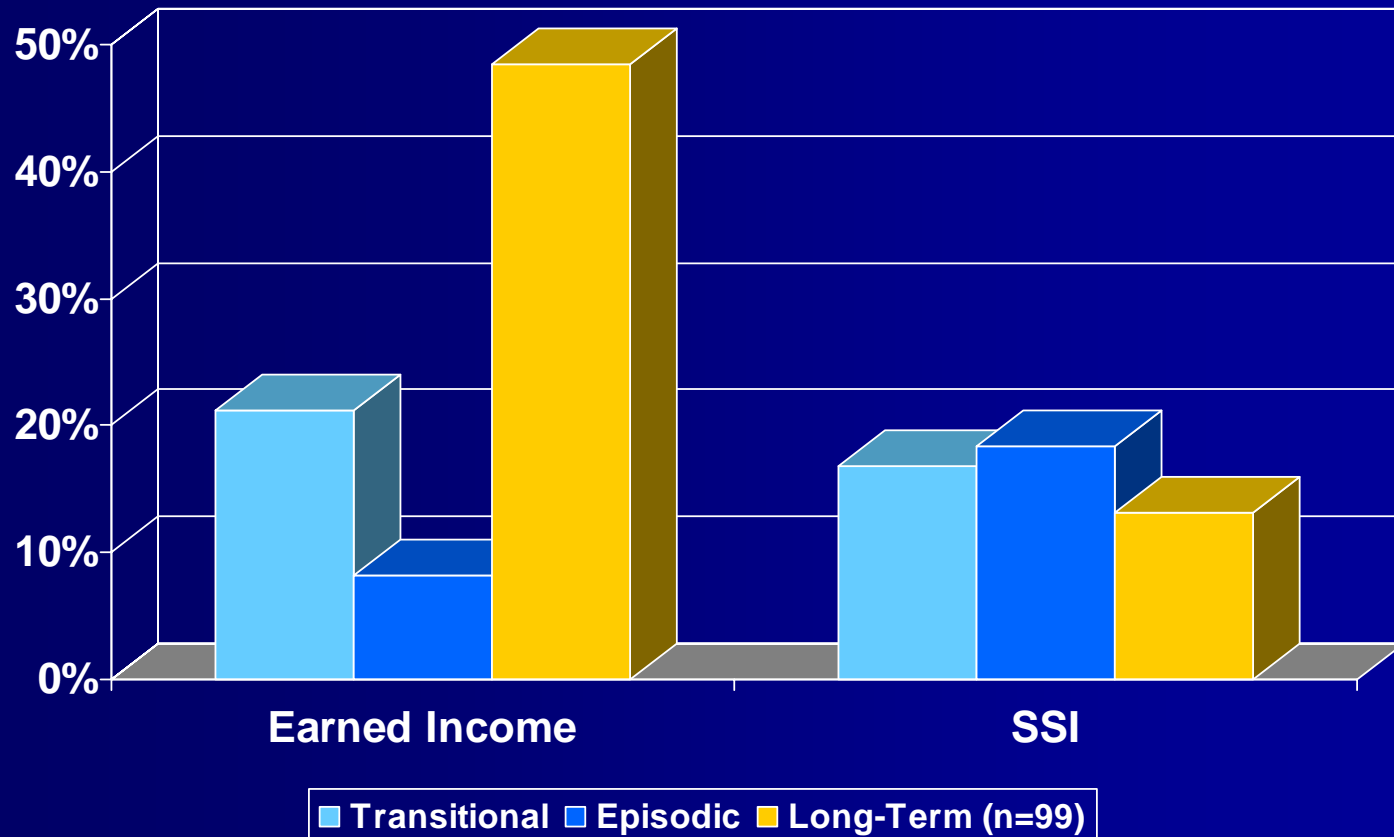
Results: Cluster Solution

- **Transitionals:**
  - 1.0 stays
  - 105 days
- **Episodics:**
  - 2.0 stays
  - 195 days
- **Long-Stayers:**
  - 1.0 stays
  - 444 days

Intensive Service Histories of Families

Income Sources

The Average Cost of Shelter Stays by Type

- Transitional $11,550
- Episodic $21,450
- Long-term $48,440

Does not include McKinney-Vento funding or non-DTA public service contracts.

Preliminary Conclusions

- Cluster patterns are robust across sites
- Most families (75%) leave quickly and don't return
- A small number (5-8%) return repeatedly
- 20-25% of families have long stays, using 55-70% of resources
- BUT – unlike singles – long stays do not show a greater need for support services

Preliminary Conclusions (continued)

- Policies and programs driving long stays
- Characteristics of "graduates" may reflect selection effects of policies and programs
- Group with most intensive service history gets relatively few system resources, and group with least intensive service history gets most system resources
- Need for reform: A new conceptual framework that matches families by need to interventions that support their independence

Model Cost by Volume Service System for Addressing Housing Emergencies

Shelter Admission

Diversion, Relocation and Transitional Rental Assistance

Volume

Prevention

Supportive Housing

Cost per Case

Community-Based programs

Mainstream systems